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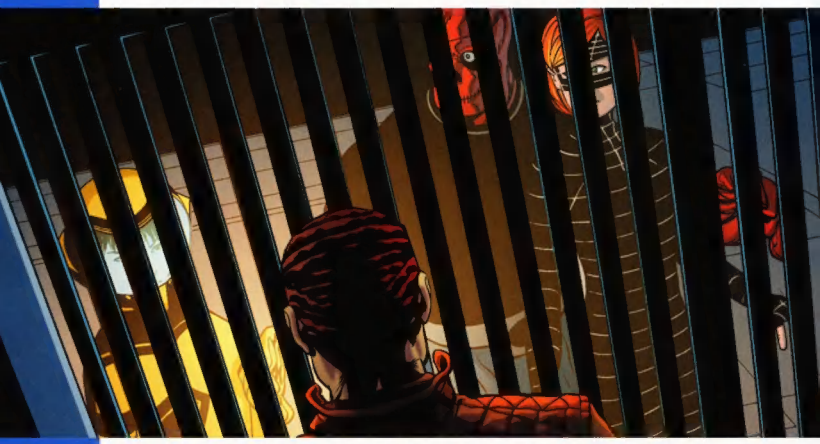
ALWAYS BEEN BIG. ALWAYS BEEN MELLOW. SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT'S A WEIRD COMBO.
USUALLY FOLKS WHO'VE NEVER BEEN TO HAWAII.
I WAS BORN TO IT, MAN. BORN TO THE BEACH, BORN TO THE BOARD.
MY CREW WAS LAID BACK. MY FOLKS, TOO. LIFE WAS EASY... SO WAS I.
JUST WASN'T MUCH WORTH GETTIN' BUMMED ABOUT, Y'KNOW? EVERYBODY BIFFS IT. YOU GET BACK ON YOUR BOARD AND TRY AGAIN.
BUT FIRST YOU STOP. STOP AND SOAK IT IN. HOW AWESOME IT WAS BEFORE THE FALL.
THAT'S WHAT I HOLD ON TO. THE SUN ON MY FACE. THE SOUND OF THE WAVES.
THE LAST GOOD DAY.

AND THERE CAME A DAY, A DAY UNLIKE ANY OTHER, WHEN EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES OPENED THEIR DOORS TO TEACH THE NEXT GENERATION! ON THAT DAY, THE AVENGERS ACADEMY WAS BORN, TO TRAIN YOUNG ADULTS TO FIGHT THE FOES NO SINGLE SUPER HERO COULD WITHSTAND!

AVENGERS ACADEMY



FOR A DIFFERENT VIEW OF THIS STORY, CHECK OUT THUNDERBOLTS #147!

DURING HIS DARK REIGN AS DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL SECURITY, NORMAN OSBORN RECRUITED YOUNG SUPERHUMANS—OFTEN BY FORCE—TO MOLD IN HIS IMAGE. THEIR "TRAINING" WAS OFTEN PAINFUL AND TRAUMATIC.

AFTER HE HELPED DEFEAT AND IMPRISON OSBORN, FOUNDING AVENGER HANK PYM UNITED WITH FELLOW HEROES TIGRA, JUSTICE, SPEEDBALL AND QUICKSILVER TO FORM AVENGERS ACADEMY TO HELP GUIDE THESE YOUNG SUPERHUMANS.

THE INAUGURAL CLASS INCLUDES VEIL, WHO CAN TRANSFORM HER BODY INTO DIFFERENT GASES; THE TOXIC HAZMAT; ELECTRICALLY POWERED STRIKER; INVULNERABLE POWERHOUSE METTLE; THE POLYMATH FINESSE; AND WERE-DINOSAUR REPTIL.

BUT THE STUDENTS' EXCITEMENT OVER BEING CHOSEN WAS QUICKLY SHATTERED WHEN THEY SECRETLY LEARNED THE TRUTH: THEY WERE SELECTED NOT BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO BE HEROES…BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE THE ONES MOST AT RISK OF BECOMING VILLAINS.

IN ORDER TO EXPOSE THE CLASS TO CRIMINALS, BUT IN A SECURE SITUATION, THE FACULTY BROUGHT THEM TO THE RAFT, A MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON FOR SUPER VILLAINS. THE RAFT ALSO HOUSES THE THUNDERBOLTS PROGRAM, INTENDED TO REHABILITATE CONVICTS UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF AVENGER LUKE CAGE. DURING A "SCARED STRAIGHT" SESSION WITH THE THUNDERBOLTS, HAZMAT SURREPTITIOUSLY KNOCKED OUT THE POWER. IN THE CONFUSION, SHE, VEIL AND METTLE SNUCK OUT TO GET REVENGE ON ONE PARTICULAR INMATE OF THE RAFT: NORMAN OSBORN…

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I GAVE YOU THE TOOLS TO RISE ABOVE THE SHEEP. AND I DON'T MEAN YOUR POWERS. YES, I AUGMENTED THEM. BUT POWER WITHOUT DIRECTION IS JUST SOUND AND FURY.
WHAT I PROVIDED YOU IS THE MEANS TO CONTROL YOUR OWN DESTINY. THE STRENGTH. THE MOTIVATION. THE EXAMPLE.
YOU RUINED OUR LIVES!
HAH! NO. PYM IS RUINING YOUR LIVES. WITH HIS COLORFUL UNIFORMS AND PRIORITY IDENTICARDS AND SECRET CLUBHOUSES.
HE KNOWS WHAT YOU'RE CAPABLE OF. AND HE'S TRYING TO LEASH YOU BEFORE YOU FIGURE IT OUT FOR YOURSELVES.
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT YOU. YOU TOOK EVERYTHING WE HAD. EVERYTHING WE WERE. AND NOW YOU'RE GONNA SUFFER FOR IT.
I'D FORGOTTEN HOW HISTRIONIC MY SON WAS AT YOUR AGE. (STILL IS, REALLY.)
WHAT IS IT YOU WANT? MORE CONTROL OVER YOUR ABILITIES? THE FREEDOM TO HAVE AWKWARD, INEPT SEX WITH YOUR INFERIORS WITHOUT KILLING THEM?
I CAN GIVE YOU THAT. EASILY.
WH-WHAT?
YOU'RE LYING. PYM'S SMARTER THAN YOU AND HE CAN'T--
PYM IS SHACKLED BY CLOSED-MINDEDNESS AND FEAR. WHAT HE WOULD NO DOUBT CALL "PROFESSIONAL ETHICS." HE NEVER COULD HAVE BROUGHT YOU TO THIS POINT. BUT SEEMS TO HAVE NO PROBLEM EXPLOITING YOU NOW THAT I'VE DONE IT.
AND HAS IT OCCURRED TO YOU HE MAY ALREADY HAVE THE ANSWERS, BUT IS WITHHOLDING THEM TO GIVE HIM LEVERAGE OVER YOU?
I COULD GIVE YOU EVERYTHING YOU WANT. I WOULD HAVE, GIVEN TIME. UNFORTUNATELY, I HIT A BIT OF A BUMP IN THE ROAD.
WAIT. Y-YOU'RE SAYING YOU CAN...
"FIX" YOU. YES.

OSBORN!
PYM. YOUR STUDENTS JUST TRIED TO KILL ME. CLEARLY YOU'RE NOT TEACHING THEM MANNERS.
QUICKSILVER. STILL HIS ERRAND BOY, I SEE.
OH, I STILL HAVE FRIENDS. MORE THAN YOU'D IMAGINE.
"STUDENTS"? HOW'D YOU KNOW--
WHERE ARE THEY, OSBORN?
NO IDEA. THEY STORMED IN HERE, POSTURING LIKE THE PUNISHER. BUT APPARENTLY THEY LACK HIS KILLER INSTINCT.
OR PERHAPS YOU BEAT IT OUT OF THEM.
QUICKSILVER, STAY HERE UNTIL THE POWER COMES BACK ON. MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T TRY TO ESCAPE.
"ESCAPE"? ESCAPE IS FOR CONVICTS. I'M A POLITICAL PRISONER.
I HAVE EVERY CONFIDENCE I'LL WALK OUT OF HERE...
WHEN MY FREEDOM'S WON BY THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN ME.

DON'T TELL ME YOU BELIEVED HIM.
I DON'T KNOW! I JUST DIDN'T WANT TO KILL ANYBODY.
YOU LEFT HIM THERE, TOO.
YEAH, AND I WANT TO PUNCH MYSELF BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW WHY.
BECAUSE WE'RE ALL DROWNING.
AND HE MIGHT HAVE A LIFE PRESERVER.
LOOK OUT!
KROOOOM

RUN! THIS IS POWDERKEG! ANYTHING HE HITS--
BWOOOM
AHH!

iHip.

DJ STYLE HEADPHONES!

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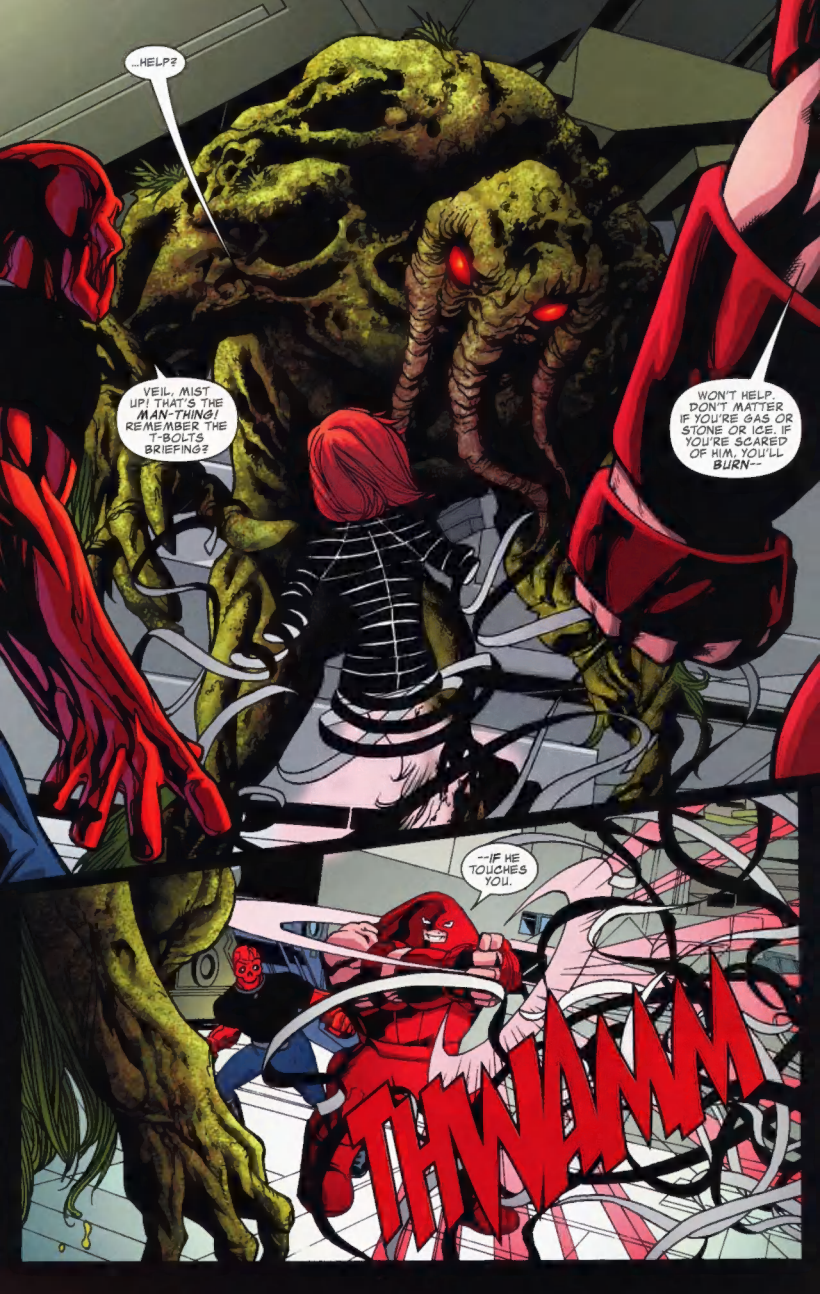
...HELP?
VEIL, MIST UP! THAT'S THE MAN-THING! REMEMBER THE T-BOLTS BRIEFING?
WON'T HELP. DON'T MATTER IF YOU'RE GAS OR STONE OR ICE. IF YOU'RE SCARED OF HIM, YOU'LL BURN--
--IF HE TOUCHES YOU.
THWAMM

MY TEAMMATE'S DRAWN TO EMOTIONS. I'M GUESSIN' YOUR TEEN DRAMA'S LIKE AN "ALL YOU CAN EAT" SIGN.
I'LL GET HIM TO HIS TERRARIUM. YOU KIDS HEAD BACK TO THE TOWER.
ANYONE MESSES WITH YOU, JUST HIT 'EM. SEEMS TO BE YOUR THING.
METTLE? ARE YOU OKAY?
THAT'S THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER BEEN IN A FIGHT. WITH SOMETHING ALIVE. I MEAN. I WAS ALWAYS SO BIG NOBODY MESSED WITH ME.
NEVER HIT ANYONE BEFORE. NEVER WANTED TO. AND I...
...I KNEW I COULD BE KILLING HIM. BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO STOP...
HEY. HEY, LET'S FIND HAZMAT, OKAY? I THINK SHE'S THROUGH THERE...
HA!
LOOKEE HERE...
A LOST LITTLE LAMB.

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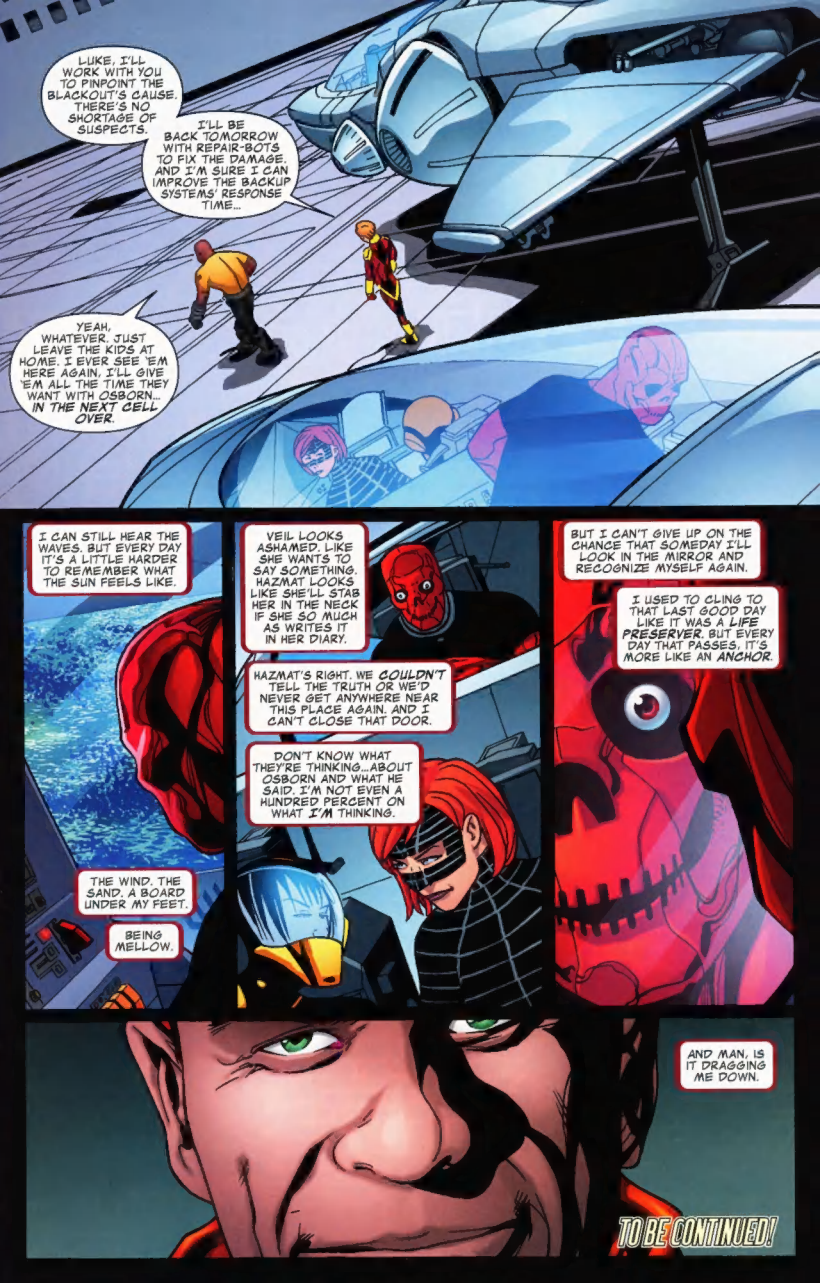
LIGHTS. FINALLY. EVERYONE SOUND OFF! TIGRA, ARE YOU--
--AH.
HRRR-- HRR-- HRR..
YOU'RE... OKAY?
CAT VERSUS MOUSE. WHAT DO YOU THINK?
ROBBIE, YOU'RE BLEEDING.
HUH? OH... THAT'S NOTHING. JUST A SCRATCH.
OKAY. THEN I GUESS ONCE WE'VE GOT THESE GUYS BACK IN THEIR CELLS, WE NEED TO FIGURE OUT EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED HERE...

SWEET CHRISTMAS!
YOU WANNA KILL OSBORN? GET IN LINE! AIN'T NO EXCUSE FOR BEIN' STUPID! YOU COULDA SET HIM FREE OR GOT WHO-KNOWS-HOW-MANY PEOPLE KILLED! NOT TO MENTION YOURSELVES!
YEAH? HE PUT A BOMB ON MY HEART! CAME AFTER MY WIFE! YOU SEE ME TEARIN' OFF HIS CELL DOOR? YOU HAVE GOT TO BE THE DUMBEST MOTHER-LOVIN'--
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT HE DID TO US.
PYM, TAKE OVER BEFORE I START CURSIN' FOR REAL.
LUKE, I'M SORRY. YOU'RE RIGHT. IT WAS RECKLESS AND DANGEROUS. AND I SHARE THE BLAME. GIVEN THEIR HISTORY, I SHOULD'VE THOUGHT TWICE BEFORE BRINGING THEM HERE.
STUDENTS, I UNDERSTAND HOW THE THREE OF YOU FEEL. BUT YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE MAGNITUDE OF WHAT ALMOST HAPPENED HERE.
ANSWER ME HONESTLY. DID YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE BLACKOUT?
THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
I NEVER USED TO WONDER. IT WAS EASY...JUST BE. BE OPEN. BE WHO YOU ARE.
THIS MIGHT BE THE LAST CHANCE I'LL EVER HAVE TO BE THAT GUY AGAIN.
NO, SIR. WE WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW HOW.
WE'D TALKED ABOUT GOING AFTER OSBORN, LIKE, FANTASIZING, Y'KNOW? WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT...IT SEEMED LIKE FATE.
BUT WE COULDN'T HURT HIM. EVEN AFTER EVERYTHING HE DID TO US. WE...WE JUST COULDN'T.
ALL RIGHT.
YOU MADE A MISTAKE, AND YOU'LL BE DISCIPLINED FOR IT. AS YOU SHOULD BE. BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW...WHAT YOU DIDN'T DO TODAY IS AS SIGNIFICANT AS WHAT YOU DID.
WE ALL UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WANTED TO KILL OSBORN. BUT WHEN THE TIME CAME, YOU WALKED AWAY. THAT SPEAKS TO YOUR CHARACTER. TO THE KIND OF PEOPLE YOU ARE.
I DON'T WANT TO MINIMIZE WHAT YOU DID. HOW WRONG IT WAS. BUT THAT YOU MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE IN THE END... IT GIVES ME HOPE FOR EVERYTHING WE'RE DOING.


LUKE, I'LL WORK WITH YOU TO PINPOINT THE BLACKOUT'S CAUSE. THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF SUSPECTS.
I'LL BE BACK TOMORROW WITH REPAIR-BOTS TO FIX THE DAMAGE. AND I'M SURE I CAN IMPROVE THE BACKUP SYSTEMS' RESPONSE TIME...
YEAH, WHATEVER. JUST LEAVE THE KIDS AT HOME. I EVER SEE 'EM HERE AGAIN, I'LL GIVE 'EM ALL THE TIME THEY WANT WITH OSBORN... IN THE NEXT CELL OVER.
I CAN STILL HEAR THE WAVES. BUT EVERY DAY IT'S A LITTLE HARDER TO REMEMBER WHAT THE SUN FEELS LIKE.
THE WIND. THE SAND. A BOARD UNDER MY FEET.
BEING MELLOW.
VEIL LOOKS ASHAMED. LIKE SHE WANTS TO SAY SOMETHING. HAZMAT LOOKS LIKE SHE'LL STAB HER IN THE NECK IF SHE SO MUCH AS WRITES IT IN HER DIARY.
HAZMAT'S RIGHT. WE COULDN'T TELL THE TRUTH OR WE'D NEVER GET ANYWHERE NEAR THIS PLACE AGAIN. AND I CAN'T CLOSE THAT DOOR.
DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE THINKING...ABOUT OSBORN AND WHAT HE SAID. I'M NOT EVEN A HUNDRED PERCENT ON WHAT I'M THINKING.
BUT I CAN'T GIVE UP ON THE CHANCE THAT SOMEDAY I'LL LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND RECOGNIZE MYSELF AGAIN.
I USED TO CLING TO THAT LAST GOOD DAY LIKE IT WAS A LIFE PRESERVER. BUT EVERY DAY THAT PASSES, IT'S MORE LIKE AN ANCHOR.
AND MAN, IS IT DRAGGING ME DOWN.
TO BE CONTINUED!

AFTER SCHOOL SPECIAL

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First: thank you! AVENGERS ACADEMY #1 and 2 both sold out and went to second printings! We're all humbled and thrilled by your amazing reaction to this book…keep spreading the word and enrolling your friends in the Academy! Now, your letters:

I would just like to first clarify that I very much enjoyed the first two issues of Avengers Academy and look forward to more. However, I am curious: why is it that Marvel keeps introducing all of these new teenage characters and then letting them fall into the background? New X-Men, Young Avengers, and Runaways were all fantastic books, yet one after the other they were cancelled and replaced with other young super-teams like Secret Warriors, Young Allies, and The Initiative.

Now this is not to say that those are not also great books, but when will you return to the others? I know the Young Avengers currently have a mini-series but it appears Runaways and the cast of New X-Men may just be doomed to be background characters forever.

Mike Sorce

Mike, in some cases, as with Young Avengers, it's a matter of the creators finding time to make the books. But by and large, characters only fade into the background if their books don't sell…so it's really up to you readers and retailers. If enough of you buy the books, the characters stick around! So I hope you'll continue to support us…because down the road I would love to have the Academy kids interact with some of the teen heroes you mention.

AVENGERS ACADEMY is easily my favorite of the Heroic Age titles. I like all the characters and every issue has surprising new revelations. I didn't catch the original appearances of these characters when they worked for Osborn, so I'm not clear on why they're at risk... please let me know which back issues or trades I need to read to get the back stories.

Kevin P. Breen

Kevin, sorry to have trimmed your letter… I'll have to do that sometimes just to make sure we have enough space. But to answer your question: AVENGERS ACADEMY #1 is actually the first appearance of all the students, except for Reptil, who appeared in an AVENGERS: THE INITIATIVE special I wrote a little while back. For back story on Osborn's activities, though, you could pick up the Dark Reign and Siege collections of AVENGERS: THE INITIATIVE…you'll see some foreshadowing of the formation of Avengers Academy. As for our students' pasts, we'll reveal bits and pieces as we go along…stay tuned!

Dear Scientist Supreme:

When Finesse asked you about her genetic parentage, and raised the possibility that Taskmaster was her father, you responded, "I can't give you the truth." This is very much sidestepping the issue, as her parents could easily be tested and compared to Finesse's DNA. Taskmaster is not needed for that process. Of course you could have been tactfully dissuading Finesse from finding out that her parents are not her biological parents. (This is my No-Prize bid.)

Frank D'Urso
Hopkinton, Massachusetts

Frank, far be it from me to deny a no-prize to a fellow Worcester County native, but the fact is that in order for Finesse's DNA to be tested against her parents', they'd have to consent, and as uncomfortable as they were with her joining Avengers Academy, they would most likely refuse. But you're right that Hank was trying his best to keep her from examining the matter too closely. Oh, and just because everyone wants it to happen… Taskmaster will be showing up in these pages within the next year. Check out his miniseries in the meantime, written by the super-talented (much as I hate to admit it) Fred Van Lente! And now a letter from a founding Avengers reader:

Avengers Academy: Great start. Been reading AVENGERS monthly since June 1963; have some pretty strong opinions. Felt Avengers should have been Marvel's flagship title since before the Kree-Skrull War. Nice now to finally see it and have 4+ Avengers fixes a month.

Quick thoughts: Quicksilver, one of my top 6 favorite Marvel characters (a more believable "Flash") looks like a dork. Get him back into his blue outfit with the lightning bolt across his torso. Worse, Pym, the "Wasp." He looks like a high school band drum major, especially from behind. Tigra? Well, her bikini is still just a little too large. [Kidding! Okay?] Anyway, neat premise; this is a great time to be an Avengers fan, the best in 47 years. Looking forward to some great stuff during the 2013 50-year celebration.

Steve Miner
Cedar City, Utah

Steve: Wow! I once had a complete collection of Avengers (had to sell #1 to 100 years ago when I was strapped for cash…get real jobs, kids, don't be like me!), but I have only been reading since the late '70s. So it's a real honor to hear praise from someone who's been there since the start. As for your criticisms, it's up to Mike what costume Quicksilver uses…I think he makes either one look great, but maybe your letter will change his mind. Regarding Hank, I will nonchalantly suggest that you keep an eye out for issue #7. Big things are coming for our founding Avenger…

We'd also like to recognize those who wrote but whose letters we didn't have room for: Travis Pullen, Dillon Jumps (Mettle has super-strength as well as invulnerability), Chris Eades, Kate Allen (Mike McKone gave Striker his terrific design!), Marco Klomfas, Mason Tripp, Anthony Couto, Phil Aitken, Josh Shaffer, Martin Hooper, Andrew Crowley, Shawn Lovell, Will Robertson (Mike McKone is indeed awesome!), my fellow Greek Jason Stephanopoulos, Daniel Gibson, Ryan Schaefer, David Dale (Jocasta isn't faculty, but she runs the Infinite Mansion…she'll be back next issue), Vince Moughan, Juan Rodriguez (Veil is 16, Justice is early 20s), Nathan Little, Jerry Cordaro, Dale Bulman, Tommy Wong (the cadets are known not to be mutants because they don't have the X-gene…the sources of their powers will be revealed in time), Alejandro Omidsalar, Bryan Holt (with Jamie, Samuel and Hemet), John Bailey, David Anderson, Mackenzy Peters, Alan Bowman, Jimmy "The Greek" Zahardis (Opa!), Dav805, Glenn Quigley and Arthur Vaz all the way from Brazil! We read and appreciate all your comments… so keep 'em coming!

30 days from now, Mike takes a break (he'll be back with #6) and my old partner in crime from AVENGERS: THE INITIATIVE, Jorge Molina, steps in to pencil the origin of Striker…and the return of Hank's arch-enemy, Whirlwind! See you then!

-Christos Gage

NEXT!

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